

Weddings B

Story and Photos by MSG Bob Haskell

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Maine Army National Guard Chaplain (MAJ) Andrew Gibson blesses the marriage of SPC Mary Welch and PFC Jesse Quirion at the Augusta State Armory in Augusta, Maine, on March 1.

WHEN SPC Mary Welch and PFC Jesse Quirion exchanged wedding vows recently, the bride, the groom, the maid of honor and the best man all wore BDUs. So did Chaplain (MAJ) Andrew Gibson of the Maine Army Guard's 52nd Troop Command, who officiated.

Welch and Quirion were married at the Augusta State Armory, on a drill weekend, in the presence of members of the 152nd Maintenance Company, their National Guard unit that, in March, was preparing to go to war.

MSG Bob Haskell works at the National Guard Bureau Public Affairs Office.

The company had been alerted for duty in the Persian Gulf region, but had not yet received a mobilization order sending them to Fort Drum, N.Y., to await further orders.

The first weekend in March was a high point in the war against terrorism. Khalid Shaikh Mohammad, the alleged mastermind of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks against the United States, was arrested in Pakistan. And Iraq began destroying its Al Samoud-2 missiles, as ordered by the United Nations.

At that time, optimists hoped this was an indication that war with Iraq might be avoided. The events also minimized the chances that the

maintenance company would actually deploy.

"Nevertheless," said Jesse, "it seemed like a good idea to tie the knot, in case we did get the call to move out." Before the couple was put on alert status, they had planned to be married in July.

"We wanted to know that God would be watching over both of us — as one — if we deploy to the Persian Gulf and it gets ugly there," Jesse added. "We want to be as one as much as possible."

That feeling is shared by many soldiers faced with the uncertainties of deploying to the tense region, said Gibson, who spent nine months in

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1997 on peacekeeping duty in Bosnia. Knowing that his wife and three children were waiting back home was a great comfort, he said.

As many as 25 Maine Army Guard soldiers were married in February, said Gibson, who performed seven of the services. Besides conducting the marriage service for soldiers of the 152nd Maint. Co., Gibson married soldiers from two other units that have been mobilized.

Two soldiers in the 112th Medical Co. from Bangor, and four members of the 1136th Transportation Co. from Bangor and Sanford were married by Gibson in private ceremonies, before those units departed for mobilization stations at Fort Drum and Fort Dix, N.J.

"This is a time of great uncertainty; the future is so unknown that couples want to gain a sense of stability," Gibson said of their desire to marry. "Individuals turn to the person they know best for that stability. It gives them a sense of peace, because the love they have for each other is strong."

Legal issues also come into play, Gibson said. Marriage ensures that dependents back home are entitled to health care, insurance benefits, and exchange and commissary privileges provided by the government.

Most of the National Guard soldiers married in Maine married civilians, Gibson said. The Quirions, who have a six-month-old baby boy, are the exception.

"I don't want to leave him, but I have to do what the Army expects of me," said Mary, who wrestled with the idea of getting a hardship discharge so she

could stay home with her new baby.

Instead, the Quirions decided to leave their child with relatives so they could deploy with their company.

"I know I'll miss him a lot while I'm gone," said Mary, who's trained to operate a 22-ton crane. She'll especially miss the baby's first birthday, and the day when he takes his first steps, she said. "But when we get back, our child will be right there waiting for us."

Always remembering that fact, the Quirions said they would like to get on with the deployment that could last for a year or longer, do their jobs and return home.

"I wanted to do something for my country," said Jesse, a heating and air conditioning technician, of his decision to enlist in the National Guard about three years ago.

"Joining the Guard and going through basic training helped square me away," he said. Serving in the military has helped prepare him to deal with whatever situations may come his way – including war and separation from loved ones far away, he said.

They're stronger together, the couple said. Each knows what the other is experiencing, and that can only strengthen their bond, Mary said. 🇺🇸



Many couples, including this soldier and his fiancée, chose to marry before deploying to Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in 1990 and 1991.